DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 274 031 EA 018 784

AUTHOR	Ellis, Thomas I.
TITLE	The Principal as Instructional Leader.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, Eugene, Oreg.; National Association of Elementary School Principals, Alexandria, VA.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	Nov 86
CONTRACT	OERI-R-86-0003
NOTE	6p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Publication Sales, National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1615 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314 ($2.00 prepaid; quantity discounts; Virginia residents add 4 percent sales tax).
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071) -- Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT	Research Roundup; v3 n1 Nov 1986
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; *Administrator Role; Elementary Secondary Education; *Instructional Leadership; *Leadership Qualities; *Principals; *School Effectiveness; Socioeconomic Influences; Values
IDENTIFIERS	Collegiality

ABSTRACT

Effective schools research has verified that schools are rarely effective unless the principal is a proficient instructional leader. This article summarizes five recent studies examining the practices and qualities comprising good instructional leadership. A Seattle study by Richard L. Andrews disclosed a statistical correlation between student gains in reading and mathematics and teachers' perceptions of their principal's effectiveness--especially in schools with many low-income students. Phillip Hallinger and Joseph Murphy found that a community's socioeconomic status heavily affected the behavior of effective instructional leaders and their choice of management style. In San Francisco, David C. Dwyer found that proficient instructional leaders act on personal beliefs and values, as well as perceptions of their schools' and communities' needs. In Texas, William Rutherford and his associates studied the principal's impact on teachers' instructional improvement efforts. The most successful principals clearly communicated expectations, provided technical assistance, and monitored the results. Finally, Thomas Bird and Judith Warren Little showed that effective instructional leadership means cultivating and sustaining norms of civility, collegiality, and continuous improvement. A summary of each study is provided, together with full bibliographic and availability information. (MLH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

FD274031

R·E·S·E·A·R·C·H roundup

Volume 3, Number 1 November 1986

The Principal as Instructional Leader

Thomas I. Ellis

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

EA 018 784

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

RESEARCH roundup

Volume 3, Number 1 November 1986

The Principal as Instructional Leader

Thomas I. Ellis

Research on effective schools has verified the proposition that schools are rarely effective unless the principal is a proficient instructional leader. But what *is* good instructional leadership, and how may we recognize it? Does it depend primarily on innate personal qualities—on a combination of intangibles we call "style" or "charisma"—or can it be traced to specific practices that can be observed, categorized, and learned?

Five recent studies have examined these matters from a variety of perspectives. Although these studies do not entirely resolve the nature-nurture issue, in providing detailed portraits of individual principals in action they set forth some basic practices and priorities that effective leaders appear to share. They also provide solid evidence of the influence such principals exert on their school's climate and their students' progress.

A study by Richard L. Andrews and others in Seattle disclosed a statistical correlation between student achievement gains in reading and mathematics on one hand and teachers' perceptions of their principals as instructional leaders on the other. This correlation was especially strong in schools with a high proportion of low-income students. The study underscores the pivotal importance of a principal's high visibility around the school in creating and sustaining a context for effective instruction.

Philip Hallinger and Joseph Murphy found that a community's socioeconomic status makes a big difference in the behavior of effective instructional leaders. Principals in high-income districts worked mostly in the background to meet the high expectations shared by parents and teachers alike, whereas principals in low-income districts took on a more active role in cultivating high expectations, thus counterbalancing lack of support or encouragement from the students' home environment.

In San Francisco, David C. Dwyer and his colleagues found that effective instructional leaders derive their approaches from their personal beliefs and values, coupled with their perception of the specific needs of their schools and communities. And all are able to link their routine day-to-day activities to their overarching goals and expectations for students.

William Rutherford and his colleagues in Texas conducted a study directed primarily at developing a typology of the interventions by which principals promote instructional improvement efforts among their teachers. The findings indicate that principals are most successful at implementing improvements in practice if they clearly communicate their expectations, provide technical assistance, and monitor the results.

Finally, Thomas Bird and Judith Warren Little show that effective instructional leadership consists in cultivating and sustaining norms of civility, collegiality, and continuous improvement.

Taken as a whole, these studies do not provide any single prescription or formula for effective instructional leadership. Nevertheless, we can derive three useful generalizations from their findings: (1) effective instructional leaders set high expectations and reinforce these expectations through their daily interaction with staff and students; (2) effective instructional leaders are responsive to the socioeconomic context of their schools and communities; and (3) such leaders cultivate norms of collegiality and mutual trust among their teachers.

Further, the studies demonstrate that a committed, caring principal can make all the difference in the world between a school where students and teachers merely "put in time" and a thriving and successful institution where principal, teachers, and students enthusiastically participate in a common vision of excellence.

Thomas I. Ellis, Ph.D., is research analyst and writer, ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, University of Oregon.

Prepared by ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management

NAESP

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

EA 018 794

1 Andrews, Richard L., and others. "Principal Roles, Other In-School Variables, and Academic Achievement by Ethnicity and SES." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association in San Francisco, April 20, 1986. 15 pages. [ED number not yet assigned]

The University of Washington and the Seattle Public Schools are collaborating on a two-year study to determine the degree to which twelve "quality indicators" are associated with students' academic achievement. This paper reports findings that pertain to one of these quality indicators—the leadership of the principal. In schools led by strong principals, do students—particularly those from low-income families—achieve at higher levels than do students in schools run by weak leaders?

Principals were judged to be strong or weak instructional leaders according to their teachers' responses to a questionnaire. Teachers rated their principals' leadership behavior in four areas: (1) mobilizing resources, (2) communicating, (3) serving as an instructional resource, and (4) being a visible presence. Teachers' perceptions were then correlated with rates of improvement in student achievement at each school, as reflected in yearly gains in California Achievement Test scores in reading and mathematics. These achievement data were then analyzed according to student ethnicity and student free lunch status as a surrogate measure of socioeconomic status (SES).

In schools whose teachers perceived their principals to be strong instructional leaders, student gains in reading and math scores were consistently higher than they were in schools run by principals who were viewed as weak leaders. Moreover, the most significant achievement gains recorded were among black and "free lunch" students in schools with strong leaders. In contrast, achievement scores for such students actually declined in schools administered by weak leaders.

These findings suggest that in schools where teachers perceive the principal to be a strong instructional leader, the educational process as a whole is more efficient and students learn more than in schools where the principal is perceived as weak. The focus on teacher perceptions is significant for this reason: it suggests that a principal's visible presence around the school may in itself contribute to more effective teaching and learning—especially among historically low-achieving students.

2 Hallinger, Philip, and Joseph Murphy. "Instructional Leadership and School Socioeconomic Status: A Preliminary Investigation." *Administrator's Notebook* 31, 5 (1983), 1-4. EJ 316 739.

This study looks at the socioeconomic context of instructional leadership, comparing the ways in which principals exercise instructional leadership in seven effective elementary schools serving student populations of differing socioeconomic status.

The authors say the principal's instructional leadership role combines what they refer to as "technological" and "climate-related" functions. "Technological" functions focus specifically on the teaching and learning process and include framing school goals, coordinating the curriculum, supervising and evaluating instruction, and monitoring student progress. "Climate" functions are activities through which a principal promotes an environment conducive to learning: protecting instructional time, providing incentives for teachers and students, promoting professional development, enforcing academic standards, and maintaining high visibility.

The socioeconomic status of these schools was found to have a definite bearing on the style of instructional leadership. In high-income schools, principals played an active role in the "technological" functions of coordinating curriculum and instruction. Their "climate" role was by contrast more passive, consisting primarily of ensuring that the school's expectations were congruent with the high expectations of parents in the community.

The effective principals in low-income schools, on the other hand, developed elaborate organizational structures to support a positive learning environment. Toward overcoming societal norms that communicate low expectations, these principals offered frequent and concrete rewards for achievement—badges and certificates, for example, presented at special assemblies. These principals also tended to exercise more direct control over instruction than did their counterparts in high-income schools.

The authors conclude that since students of high and low

About ERIC

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) is a national information system operated by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement. ERIC serves educators by disseminating research results and other resource information that can be used in developing more effective educational programs.

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, one of several such units in the system, was established at the University of Oregon in 1966.

Prior to publication, this manuscript was submitted to the National Association of Elementary School Principals for critical review and determination of professional competence. The publication has met such standards.

This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education under contract no. OERI-R-86-0003. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of NAESP or the Department of Education. No federal funds were used in the printing of this publication.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, University of Oregon, 1787 Agate Street, Eugene, Oregon 97403. (503) 686-5043.

OERI

Office of Educational Research and Improvement
U.S. Department of Education

socioeconomic status bring dissimilar skills, attitudes, and expectations to school, they require different forms of reinforcement for their behavioral and academic accomplishments. Principals in low-income schools must assert themselves more forcefully to sustain high expectations, make instructional decisions, and intervene in classrooms whose teachers are performing below par, whereas principals in upper-income schools tend to orchestrate more from the background.

3 **Dwyer, David C., and others.** ***Five Principals in Action: Perspectives on Instructional Management.*** **San Francisco: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, March 1983. 61 pages. ED 231 085.**

If, as research indicates, successful principals create schools that are safe and orderly, where basic skills are emphasized, where teachers hold high expectations for students, and where instructional programs are linked to carefully monitored objectives, what do successful principals actually do, day in and day out, to develop and maintain this "climate" for learning?

To find out, Dwyer and his colleagues spent eight weeks shadowing and interviewing five principals at four top-notch elementary schools and one junior high school. The sample included both men and women, blacks and whites, and leaders of schools with diverse student populations, differing socioeconomic contexts, and varied organizational approaches to instructional management. The data were compiled into narrative case studies describing the essential qualities of the organizational contexts, the activities that best typified the principals' management behavior, and the expected outcomes of those actions as projected by the principals.

These effective principals directed their daily activities along two major avenues: climate and instructional organization. One principal, for example, took over a dimly lit, untidy school—known as the worst in the district—where teachers scarcely spoke to one another and students fought continuously. He formulated a five-year plan to change the school's image and raise achievement levels.

"Climate" was his first line of attack: he organized parents into work parties that cleaned the school and painted it in bright colors. He visited classrooms and talked to students about their work. He established his presence throughout the school. Once student behavior improved, he turned his attention to instructional organization. After teaching some sample lower-level reading classes, he provided observation time and inservice training, praised teachers who made a sincere effort to improve, gave scrupulous attention to the hiring and assignment of teachers, and restructured the instructional program to emphasize math, reading, and language development in the lower grades. In addition, he closely monitored the progress of individual students with serious learning problems. By thus reshaping the instructional program and transforming the daily realities of his students, he was able to fulfill the expectations aroused by his initial gestures to enhance the climate.

All five principals in the Dwyer study emphasized the importance of achievement, especially in basic skills, and they shaped their expectations in accordance with their personal histories and beliefs, coupled with their perception of community and institutional needs. Thus one principal in a poverty area spoke of getting her children off "the welfare cycle," while another principal in a multiethnic school stressed the importance of learning to live in harmony. A third principal expressed his strong democratic and egalitarian values, not only in his overall conception of the school mission but also in his daily activities. Thus he routinely consulted staff, parents, students, and even community members before making decisions.

In sum, these principals assessed their environments, knew their limitations and strengths, and understood the kinds of programs and outcomes they desired for their students. Dwyer and his colleagues were most impressed by the principals' ability, through all the uncertainty and conflict of their environments, to instill, and continually reinforce, a sustaining vision of their school's mission among their staffs, students, and patrons.

4 **Rutherford, William L., and others.** ***The Role of the School Principal in School Improvement Efforts.*** **Austin: Research and Development Center for Teacher Education, University of Texas, 1983. 49 pages. ED 250 814.**

Although it is instructive to study effective schools and the practices and demographics involved in their operation, there are also many schools caught in the grip of mediocrity and needing help. Principals confronted by the challenge of turning such schools around must go beyond the routine in initiating and sustaining school improvement efforts. They must in particular decide when and how to intervene in the classroom to promote new instructional practices.

Rutherford and his colleagues investigated the kinds of interventions principals initiate toward improving practice in their schools, and the effects of these interventions on teachers. The study focused on a group of nine elementary school principals. Each intervention the principals undertook was coded according to such factors as degree of complexity, purpose, targets, and location.

After generally discussing the findings (drawn from a database of more than 2,000 actions), the researchers describe several types of interventions that appear to be characteristic, along with their effects on teachers. In one instance,

the authors compare the behavior of three principals performing classroom observations. One gave very little feedback; the second focused on identifying weaknesses; and the third discussed the observation and also required that teachers regularly submit a written plan for improvement. The combined effects of the third principal's interventions were that teachers knew what was expected of them, they were given assistance by the principal in planning for improvement, and they worked extra hard to deliver what they had agreed upon.

The findings indicate that interventions by principals have both immediate and cumulative effects on teacher behavior. Interventions that communicate the principal's expectations and are followed by actions to assist and monitor are most likely to result in improvement. Moreover, the study indicates clearly that more than one year of support and facilitation for teachers is required to implement an instructional innovation: "Principals must recognize that their role as change facilitator does not come to an end after just one year."

5 Bird, Thomas D., and Judith Warren Little. *Instructional Leadership in Eight Secondary Schools.* Final Report. Boulder, Colorado: Center for Action Research, Inc., June 1985. 281 pages. ED 263 694.

For a detailed look at instructional leadership, Bird and Little performed extensive case studies in five secondary schools and then surveyed administrators, department heads, and teachers in these five and three additional schools to gather further information about these leaders' expectations and practices.

Several basic findings from this study have implications for elementary as well as secondary school principals. In successful schools, Bird and Little found, teachers work closely together as colleagues, and teaching practices are open to scrutiny, discussion, and refinement. Instructional leaders work hard to build and sustain this spirit of collegiality and continuous improvement: "By each interaction, teachers and administrators confirm or erode that set of professional norms and relations on which steady improvement rests." Principals who build professional relations among their teachers based on high standards coupled with mutual trust and respect are most likely to be successful.

Certain key practices—including regular classroom observation with predictable criteria and procedures, collaborative curriculum development, shared planning and preparation of lessons and materials, and frequent discussion of teaching—emerge from this study as the essential elements of effective instructional leadership.

Bird and Little conclude that these practices are not inextricably bound up with the character and style of individual principals. Rather, they say effective leadership can be described and taught at the level of precept and practice, and made part of principals' selection, training, and support.

Research Roundup is issued as a service to members. Copies may be purchased from the National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1615 Duke Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314. One copy $2.00; 2-9 copies $1.50 each; 10 or more copies $1.00 each. Virginia residents should add 4% sales tax. **Payment must accompany order.**

(ISSN 8755-2590)

1615 Duke Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

R·E·S·E·A·R·C·H
roundup

The Principal as Instructional Leader

Volume 3, Number 1, November 1986

Nonprofit Org
U.S. Postage
PAID
Washington, D.C.
Permit #8009